



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Office of Fire and Aviation
3833 S. Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705-5354

IN REPLY REFER TO:

In Reply, Refer to:
9400 (FA-500)

APR 27 2006

Mr. Doug Murphy
Regional Administrator
FAA, Northwest Mountain Region (ANM)
1601 Lind Avenue SW
Renton, WA 98055-4056

Dear Mr. Murphy:

A new control tower is planned at the Boise airport and the FAA has indicated to the Idaho congressional delegation and to Boise airport management that they are planning to relocate the Boise Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) from Boise to Salt Lake City. This is being proposed as a cost-saving consolidation. However, it has the potential to adversely affect state and federal firefighting agencies operating in the greater Boise area. Fire occurrence is high within the wild land-urban interface over a broad geographic area surrounding Boise and presents a high risk for destruction of life and property. This is especially true of the foothills north of Boise, where high-value residential expansion is occurring.

Numerous fire suppression aircraft operate from the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) ramp at the Boise airport each summer. These aircraft respond to many fires near or within the Class C airspace. In addition, other tactical aircraft (large air tankers, single engine air tankers, helicopters, etc.) often respond to these fires from outside the Boise area and operate from the Boise airport for periods ranging from a few hours to several weeks. All firefighting pilots in this environment work directly with Approach Control to facilitate expedient and safe flight patterns.

Aviation managers at NIFC and the local level are concerned about the potential adverse impacts to the excellent service the Boise TRACON currently provides to BLM and other agencies during fire operations along the Boise front. Presently, the Boise Tower and TRACON personnel work from the same location. They typically move between the two positions often during their shifts. This provides the controllers a good "feel" for what is happening in the entire Boise area and how it relates to airport operations. Additionally, an annual meeting is held with local BLM aviation managers, primary air attack pilots and the Boise controllers to discuss projected fire potential, local firefighting aircraft assignments and review coordination procedures. This type of face-to-face communication has proven very beneficial to both parties when complex fires occur within or near the Class C airspace. These types of benefits will not be possible if the controllers are moved to Salt Lake City.

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The consolidation of TRACON controllers in Salt Lake City will result in those controllers having the radar image, but not the situational awareness that local controllers currently have to efficiently and safely coordinate fire fighting aircraft with commercial, military and general aviation activity at Boise.

The BLM and the interagency firefighting community in Boise are opposed to this proposed shift of air traffic control responsibility. We respectfully request that you reconsider this move.

A copy of this letter is being provided to the U.S. Congressional delegation from Idaho.

Questions regarding this issue may be directed to Dave Dash, Chief, Division of Aviation, 208-387-5448.

Sincerely,
/s/ THOMAS H. DYER

Tom Dyer, Acting
Director, BLM Office of Fire & Aviation

cc: Senator, Larry Craig
Senator, Mike Crapo
Representative, C. L. Otter,
Representative, Mike Simpson
Fire Program Advisor, FA-101, WO

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